

Prophecy: Literature and Divine Intervention

Seminar Leader: Jeffrey Champlin
Course Times: Tuesday and Thursday 10:45-12:15
Email: j.champlin@berlin.bard.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday 12:30-1:30 or by appointment

Course Description

This course examines the claim of the prophetic word to call down a higher power that shakes moral and political complacency. Moving from ancient and medieval religious texts to romantic poetry and modernist literature, we look at how prophecy both draws on and interrupts key genres and institutions. Some key questions: How might studying prophetic pronouncements open creative approaches to the future? How do they relate to enlightenment theories of historical progress? Can they help us critique our current cultural fascination with dystopia? What new forms does prophecy take in a supposedly secular age? We will be particularly interested in the role of the minority voice and the relation between the call to action and the new audiences and actors that respond to it. Readings include: texts from the Vedic and Abrahamic traditions, Sophocles, Hildegard of Bingen, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Joachim of Fiore, William Blake, Heinrich von Kleist, Percy Shelley, William Butler Yeats, James Baldwin, and Miranda Mellis

Requirements

We will make the most of the liberal arts seminar format by developing ideas and analysis through a process of discussion and writing. Toward that end, each student will contribute a short presentation and write a midterm and final paper. Overall class participation is also essential, and will be evaluated based on consistently preparing the readings and class engagement.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the

Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Please let me know by email as soon as possible when you are absent due to illness.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assignments and Assessment

Class presentations: Students will present on one text as per a sign-up sheet. Each presentation of about 15 minutes will examine key passages of your choice as guided by a commentary handout that I will provide. In turn, you will provide your own handout for the class that focuses your reading of the text. You are encouraged to write your **midterm or final papers** on the text that you present on. In this manner, your essay can expand on the insights and questions that arose from your class contribution and the discussion that follows your readings.

Writing Assignments: Students will write two papers. The first will be focused on one text and the second will develop a longer comparative analysis of two texts we have studied in the class. The midterm paper will be 2,000 words, the final will be 3,000 words.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students will receive feedback for their course work during and at the end of the semester. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Class participation (quality and quantity): 25%
Presentation: 20%
Midterm essay (2000 words): 25%
Final essay (3000 words): 30%

Course Materials

Books:

Please purchase: Mellis, Miranda, *Crocoshia* (Nightboat, 2025)

Additional readings as on the schedule below will be provided through Google Classroom.

Schedule

Week 1
January 27 Introduction

January 29 Blanchot, "Prophetic Speech"

Week 2

February 3 Isaiah 6,7,20,40,51,58

February 5 Jeremiah 1,6,8,27,52

Week 3

February 10 "The Symptoms of Kali-yuga" in: *Srimad Bhagavata Mahapurana*

February 12 "The Prophecy of the Superior Maitreya"

Week 4

February 17 Jung, *I Ching* "Foreword"

February 19 *I Ching*

Week 5

February 24 Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*

February 26 Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*

Week 6

March 3 Atherton, Mark, ed. *Hildegard of Bingen: Selected Writings* (selections)

March 5 Atherton, Mark, ed. *Hildegard of Bingen: Selected Writings* (selections)

Week 7

March 8 Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The Prophetia Merlini of Geoffrey of Monmouth* (selections)

March 12 Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The Prophetia Merlini of Geoffrey of Monmouth* (selections)

MIDTERM PAPER DUE

Week 8

March 17 Joachim of Fiore, *Liber Figurarum* ("Book of Figures") (selections)

March 19 Joachim of Fiore *Liber Figurarum* ("Book of Figures") (selections)

Week 9

March 24 Balfour, *Romantic Prophecy* (selections)

March 26 Lowth, "Prophetic Poetry" in: *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*.

Spring Break

Week 10

April 7 Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

April 9 Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

Week 11

April 14 Kleist, "Michael Kohlhaas"

April 16 Kleist, "Michael Kohlhaas"

Week 12

April 21 Percy Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry"

April 23 Percy Shelley, "Prometheus Unbound," "Ode to the West Wind," "The Mask of Anarchy"

Week 13

April 28 William Butler Yeats, "Second Coming"

April 30 Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues"

Week 14

May 5 Miranda Mellis, *Crocosmia*

FINAL PAPER DUE FOR GRADUATING SENIORS

May 7 Miranda Mellis, *Crocosmia*

May 15 FINAL PAPER DUE FOR REMAINING STUDENTS